

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2006

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Science, the Departments
of State, Justice, and Commerce, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations and
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Allan Mollohan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Science, the Departments
of State, Justice, and Commerce, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

Last year, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2005 to continue successful and lifesaving programs, while also taking the next steps to end sexual and domestic violence. The federal fight to end violence against women is over ten years old and great progress has been made, but there is still much work to do. The National Violence Against Women Survey found that nearly 25 percent of U.S. women report that they have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner during their lifetimes and 1 in 6 has been the victim of attempted or completed rape. The cost of intimate partner violence exceeds \$5.8 billion each year, \$4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health care services. In fiscal year 2007, we must demonstrate our continued commitment to ending domestic and sexual violence by dedicating the necessary resources to fulfill the promise of VAWA 2005. Accordingly, we urge you to fully fund the VAWA programs in the Department of Justice at \$680 million and in the Department of Health and Human Services at \$320 million.

Funding for the cornerstone criminal justice programs created by VAWA is critical to supporting the safety of victims. Established grant programs have provided support and increased training for police, prosecutors, and court officials, and greatly improved the criminal justice system's response to victims; two examples are the STOP (Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors) program – VAWA's largest grant program, distributed to every state and territory – and the Grants to Encourage Arrest and Enforce Protection Orders program. Tremendous progress has been made, but additional investments are needed to ensure that victims can access the legal system safely. We urge you to fund the Legal Assistance for Victims, Court Training and Improvements, and Privacy Protections for Victims programs to meet this need and maximize VAWA's effectiveness in the criminal justice system. In addition, we support the new program created in VAWA 2005

through set-asides from Department of Justice administered programs, to fund culturally and linguistically specific community-based organizations addressing violence against women in their communities.

VAWA 2005 also recognizes the unique needs of sexual assault survivors by creating the Sexual Assault Services Program, the first federal funding stream to support the crisis intervention and advocacy work of local rape crisis centers. In an effort to ensure that victims in *all* communities receive the services they need, SASP also includes a 10% set-aside for culturally specific organizations addressing sexual assault within their own communities. Overall, this program is needed now more than ever in light of the FBI's 2004 Uniform Crime Report, which revealed that the only violent crime to show any increase from 2003 to 2004 was forcible rape. Full funding of this program at its authorized level is critical to addressing the needs of sexual assault survivors.

As systems become more responsive to wide-ranging communities, more and more women seek protection for themselves and their children by reaching out to the law enforcement community and the courts. This creates increased demand on the under funded lifesaving victim services, emergency shelter, and housing resources. Since its launch in 1996 the National Domestic Violence Hotline has answered almost 1.5 million calls. Yet ever-increasing demand coupled with dwindling resources and outdated equipment left an estimated 30,000 calls unanswered last year. In 2004, over a quarter of a million women and children were turned away from domestic violence shelters due to a lack of resources. We must respond decisively to this critical shortage by fully funding the Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) battered women's shelters program and the National Hotline.

We also must support battered women's progress towards independence and safety by funding programs that address the housing needs of victims. In a survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 44% of the mayors surveyed cited domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness. The newly authorized Transitional Housing program seeks to provide a bridge between shelter and permanent housing for victims. Long-Term Stability for Victims is a new, innovative program that will leverage new partnerships to create housing solutions that enable victims to become self-sufficient. The Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization Grants are also critical to addressing the needs of victims in areas where resources are most scarce. New changes to this program expand eligibility for rural areas in 31 non-rural states, calling for additional funding to meet the need in these areas, including profoundly rural areas in California, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin. In addition, we urge you to support Training and Services to End Violence Against Women in Later Life and Disabled Women, the only programs that offer this type of training and protection for some of society's most vulnerable members.


VAWA is working to break the cycle of violence, but to see further savings, both in lives and in dollars, we call for full funding for VAWA programs that address the needs of children who witness violence and younger victims of violence. Studies suggest that as many as 10 million children witness domestic violence every year, and the Department of Justice finds that over half of all reported rapes are to minors under the age of 18. The Department of Justice consistently finds that girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of non-fatal intimate partner violence. This year also provides an opportunity to invest in programs to protect children by increasing collaboration between domestic violence and child welfare systems. Intervening earlier in the cycle of violence is critical to ending domestic and sexual violence and we must invest in these new directions, while sustaining successful existing programs like Campus Grants and Safe Havens/Supervised Visitation Centers.


We also must devote resources to abuse prevention. In VAWA 2005, Congress created new programs to improve the healthcare system's response to victims of domestic and sexual violence by training health professionals and identifying and assessing what are the more effective interventions in healthcare settings. Funding is also needed for innovative prevention efforts that engage men and youth in preventing domestic and


sexual violence. Finally, we must fully fund at their authorized levels two existing successful prevention programs: the Rape Prevention and Education Grant Program and the Community Initiatives to Prevent Abuse. In 2002, Rape Prevention and Education program grantees provided more than 3 million school and community educational seminars aimed at stopping rape in their communities. All of these programs are critical to preventing violence before it starts.


This year we have an exciting opportunity to demonstrate a new commitment to the needs of victims of sexual assault and continue our strong commitment to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, as well as make additional gains through new targeted, efficient programs. We urge that you support full funding for programs that address these crimes and provide needed social service responses. Full funding for VAWA is a crucial investment in our communities—it will save lives, prevent future crimes, and result in reduced costs.

Sincerely,


HILDA L. SOLIS
Co-Chair, Congressional Caucus for
Women's Issues

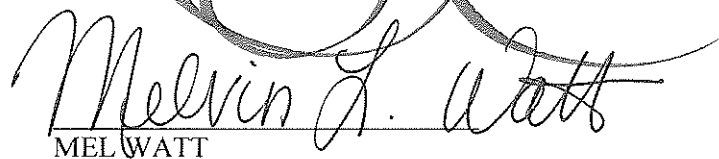

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